

Colorectal Cancer

What is the Colon?

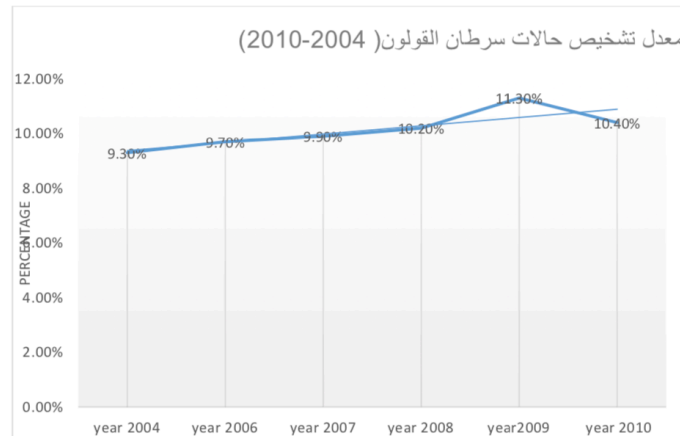
The colon is the lower part of the digestive system and is known as the large intestine.

Colorectal Cancer:

Colorectal cancer is a term that combines colon cancer and rectal cancer. It usually begins as small clumps of cells called polyps that form on the inside of the colon. Over time, some of these polyps can become cancerous tumors over a range of 5 to 10 years. Individual over 50 are at a higher risk of developing colorectal cancer. Although this type of cancer may be preventable, it can be fatal, because people are often too embarrassed to undergo early detection screening tests for this type of cancer. The exact cause of colorectal cancer is still unknown.

Colorectal Cancer Statistics:

Overall, 90% of colorectal cancer cases occur in people aged 50 and older, and it is ranked at the top in terms of incidence rates in men and women.



Causes of Colorectal Cancer:

There is no specific cause for colorectal cancer; however, studies have found several factors that can increase a person's risk of colorectal cancer, but it's not yet clear exactly how all of these factors might cause this cancer. Some of the causes, that may lead to developing colorectal cancer, include:

- Exposure to chemicals and carcinogens.
- Exposure to radioactive materials and radiation.
- Hormonal or genetic disorder.
- Genetics and family history of the disease.

Risk Factors:

Factors, that may increase your risk of colorectal cancer, include:

- The risk of developing colorectal cancer increases with age.
- Chronic inflammatory intestinal diseases: Inflammatory bowel disease, ulcerative colitis and Crohn's disease.
- Family history (or personal history) of colorectal cancer or polyps.
- Low-fiber, high-fat diet.
- Consuming too much red meat and processed meat.
- Inactivity.
- Diabetes.
- Obesity.

Symptoms:

Early symptoms of the disease: Keep in mind that exhibiting any of these symptoms does not necessarily mean that you have a cancerous tumor.

- Changes in your bowel habits, (including diarrhea or constipation or a change in the consistency of your stool for more than two weeks).
- Rectal bleeding or blood in your stool.
- Persistent abdominal discomfort, such as cramps, gas or pain.
- Persistent abdominal pain and swelling in the colon.

- Weakness, stress, lack of appetite for food, and undue deterioration of health.
- Unexplained weight loss.
- Severe, unexplained anemia with age.

Diagnosis:

Medical history and physical examination:

- To determine if the patient has family or personal history of colorectal cancer.
- To determine if the patient has family or personal history of colon polyps.
- To detect any symptoms of colorectal cancer.

Screening Tests and Radiation:

- Stool tests to check the stool for blood (Fecal occult blood test).
- Using a special scope to examine the inside of your colon (colonoscopy and sigmoidoscopy).
- Radiographic imaging.

Complications:

Complications may arise based on several factors:

The stage during which the disease was diagnosed and how far the cancer cells have spread in the body. Detecting colorectal cancer during its earliest stage provides the greatest chance for a cure.

Different possible complications and side effects may arise depending on the type of treatment that is used and the stage of the disease:

- The side effects of chemotherapy and radiation therapy.
- The side effects of surgical treatment.
- Not responding to treatment or cancer recurrence.

Treatment:

- **There are several treatment options that are determined based on:**
 1. The type of the tumor.
 2. The location of the tumor in the colon.
 3. The stage and extent of the tumor.
 4. The patient's overall health.
 5. If the patient suffers from other conditions.
- **Treatment options include:**
 1. Surgical treatment.
 2. Chemotherapy.
 3. Radiation therapy.
 4. Immunotherapy.

Prevention:

How to prevent colorectal cancer:

- Quit smoking.
- Avoid obesity and maintain a healthy weight.
- Limit your intake of fats (especially saturated fats).
- Eat a variety of fruits, vegetables and healthy, high-fiber foods.
- Exercise regularly.
- Consult your doctor upon noticing any abnormal changes in your body.

When to see a doctor:

If you notice any persistent colorectal cancer symptoms that worry you, make an appointment with your doctor as soon as possible. Remember, colorectal cancer can affect younger people as well as older adults.



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Early Detection of Colorectal Cancer

Colorectal cancer is one of the few types of cancer that can effectively be detected at its early stages with the help of:

- A fecal occult blood test.
- A sigmoidoscopy or colonoscopy.

Clinical Health Education Department

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